DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 447 442 CS 014 139

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TITLE A Literacy Guide for School Governors: The Role of School Governors in Raising Literacy Standards.
INSTITUTION National Literacy Trust, London (England).
PUB DATE 1998-00-00
NOTE 24p.
AVAILABLE FROM For full text: http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/Database/Governors.html.
PUB TYPE Guides - Non-Classroom (055)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Case Studies; *Educational Policy; Elementary Secondary Education; Foreign Countries; *Literacy; Public Education; State Schools
IDENTIFIERS *England

ABSTRACT

The National Literacy Trust first produced this literacy guide for governors in 1998, when a free copy was sent to all Chairs of Governing Bodies of state schools in England. Among other things, the guide covers the role of governors and how to get started in a literacy policy. It includes illustrations of the different approaches taken by schools, questions that governors could ask, and a list of 40 diverse resources. The guide is divided into the following sections: Introduction; (1) Developing a School Literacy Policy; (2) The Literacy Governor; (3) Primary Schools and the National Literacy Strategy; (4) Other National Literacy Initiatives; (5) Literacy in Secondary Schools; (6) Partnership with Parents; (7) Working with the Community; and (8) Resources for Governors. (NKA)

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ED 447 442

# A Literacy Guide for School Governors

## The role of school governors in raising literacy standards

The National Literacy Trust, with the help of the ISCG (Information for school and College Governors) produced a literacy guide for governors published in 1998. Thanks to funding provided by the DfEE and the Clothworkers Foundation, a free copy was sent to all Chairs of Governing Bodies of state schools in England. Additional copies were also available from the National Literacy Trust. Unfortunately these have now sold out. A full version of the guide is now available below. Be aware that this document is accurate for 1998 and since then many issues have moved on. If the Trust receives sufficient funding, it will update the guide.

Among other areas, the guide covers the role of governors and how to get started on a literacy policy. It includes illustrations of the approaches taken by schools, questions that governors could ask and a useful list of resources. Below are some extracts taken from the guide:

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Introduction Neil McClelland, Director of the National Literacy Trust
John Stannard, National Director of the National Literacy Strategy

1. Developing a school literacy policy

2. The literacy governor

3. Primary schools and the National Literacy Strategy

4. Other national literacy initiatives

5. Literacy in secondary schools

6. Partnership with parents

7. Working with the community

8. Resources for governors

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# Introduction

All of us involved in producing this guide are experienced governors. We know how hard effective governing bodies work and how satisfying the partnership with school staff can be. We also recognise the importance of carefully establishing and nurturing the supportive role we can play as governors.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank, in particular, Information for School and College Governors and my colleague Viv Bird for their hard work in producing this guide.

Literacy underpins the school curriculum and the National Literacy Trust welcomes the Government's commitment to literacy which is being delivered in many ways and most particularly via the National Literacy Strategy. All schools work hard to promote the confidence and competence in reading, writing, speaking and listening skills of their pupils that are critical for their wider learning, employment and social inclusion. Motivating children and young people to engage in reading and writing for pleasure, and beyond the formal curriculum, is an important aim for all schools, along with parents and the wider community. The National Year of Reading, with its high-profile promotion of reading, will contribute to this broader objective.

In the drive to raise literacy standards parents and teachers are most important. However, their contribution can be significantly supported, endorsed and sharpened by the appropriate involvement of governors. We hope this guide will inform and support governors in their work with teachers and parents so that more pupils and young people achieve their literacy targets and then their wider dreams.

Neil McClelland
Director of the National Literacy Trust

## The National Literacy Strategy and the Role of Governors

It is hard to think of anything in primary education more important than the achievement of literacy. I know of no governors or teachers who would disagree with this.

The Government is committed to raising standards of literacy and has set a challenging, but achievable, national target. The National Literacy Strategy involves every school in the drive to raise standards. Implementation of the strategy demands the co-operation of all involved in running our schools, and so governors have an essential role to play.

Each primary school will have identified a governor to attend a conference run by its LEA in summer 1998 to introduce the National Literacy Strategy. The guidance that follows is designed to give practical advice to build on that introduction and support the work of the school's literacy governor. It is also aimed at the governing body as a whole who, with headteachers and other senior staff, share a corporate responsibility for improving pupils' literacy standards.

Schools face varied challenges depending on their social and economic contexts, sizes,

types, locations and the specialisms of their staffs. Whatever the circumstances, we can be sure that schools can and do make a difference. That difference is due to two major factors: the quality of leadership and management offered by the headteacher and governing body and the quality of teaching in the classroom.

I wish governors well as they help to raise literacy standards, and am grateful to the National Literacy Trust for this contribution to the strategy.

John Stannard
Director National Literacy Strategy

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# 1. Developing a school literacy policy

**The role of governors**
The governing body is responsible for the overall direction of the school and helps to set high standards and expectations of its pupils. The headteacher and staff are responsible for the day-to-day management and the implementation of policies.
The responsibility for helping their schools raise literacy standards is an extension of the existing triple role of governing bodies. The elements of this role are:

1. **Critical Friendship**
The head should always consult the governing body about school policies and proposed changes to them. The governing body should never be afraid to subject proposals to careful scrutiny. A governing body, under the leadership of the chair, should respect the views of the school, and its professional advisers, but be aware that governors provide an additional perspective that can usefully guide the pace, and nature, of the challenge to raise literacy standards.

2. **Accountability**
Governors are accountable to parents with legal responsibilities to report annually to the parent body and to provide information about pupils' progress through a written annual report. The governing body is also accountable in a different way to the local community, to the local education authority (LEA) and to OFSTED for their strategic management of the school, including their plans to raise literacy standards.

3. **Strategic Planning**
The governing body, along with the head, share joint responsibility for strategic planning, including the setting of school literacy targets.

This flowchart illustrates the annual process by which heads, teachers and governing bodies can work together on strategic planning.

**Head** presents school audit of school literacy standards and expected pupil achievement
**Governing Body** uses benchmarking data to evaluate school's literacy standards

**Head** draws up, with help of staff and governors, a whole-school literacy policy
**Governing Body** helps to set demanding targets and agrees literacy policy

**Head** prepares a literacy action plan linked to school development plan
**Governing Body** agrees and oversees the monitoring of the plan

**Head** reviews and reports regularly on the plan's implementation
**Governing Body** uses targets to focus effort and monitor progress

**Head**reports on the plan's effect on achievement and whether targets were met
**Governing Body** assesses whether the plan has been cost effective, discusses and agrees any changes

Getting started on a school literacy policy

The process for developing a school literacy policy will be the same as for other areas of school policy. Governors will need to be fully informed about:

- the school's intake;
- the standards pupils achieve and how these compare with similar schools;
- professional development issues; and
- resource implications.

Governors are responsible for agreeing a literacy policy which:

- makes it clear that everyone in the school community can contribute to improving literacy;
- includes targets for improvement in literacy standards;
- promotes consistency in marking work, checking presentation, spelling and hand-writing;
- includes a development plan to stimulate interest and enthusiasm for reading;
- provides strategies for working with pupils who have reading difficulties; and
- uses Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) to support literacy across the curriculum.

Once the school has agreed its literacy action plan the governing body should be clear:

- how the plan will be monitored and by whom;
- what is the timetable for action;
- which governor committee will receive school reports on progress; and
- when the governing body will review and evaluate the plan.

**NOTE**
The governing body will need to take into account any particular circumstances that will affect the pace at which the school can implement the literacy policy and be realistic about what can be achieved, in the context of other school priorities and commitments.

**Illustration**
**How one school drew up its literacy policy**

A working group of staff and governors was set up to brainstorm and identify information needs about existing standards and resources for literacy, including parental and community support. The school carried out a literacy audit and submitted proposals for the working party to consider and comment on. A draft policy, with a literacy action

plan giving a timetable and procedures for monitoring and evaluation, was submitted to the governing body for approval. Governors ensured that parents were consulted and kept informed through newsletters and meetings. The governing body nominated a literacy governor who would make regular visits to see the literacy policy in action and feed back any observations to the governing body. It also agreed, with the head, which governor committee would receive and comment on the school's monitoring report on progress.

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## 2. The literacy governor

Primary schools will have already appointed a literacy governor to attend the local training conference in the summer term 1998. Secondary schools may also find it helpful to appoint a literacy governor to work with the school and support a whole-school approach to literacy. As in the case of the governor for special educational needs (SEN), giving one governor specific responsibility will raise the profile of literacy and ensure literacy stays on the agenda. But the whole governing body retains the responsibility for raising standards of literacy. The literacy governor should not be a teacher, but a lay governor who will bring a complementary view to the professional one.

**The role of the literacy governor**

The literacy governor provides the link between the governing body, its committees, and the staff. In the first instance, this means asking questions about current policy and practice, for example, reporting on the progress of the Literacy Hour and supporting positive liaison and involvement with parents. The governing body should make it clear what the role of the literacy governor is in relation to the governor committees and to the SEN governor. The literacy governor should, of course, always remember that he/she is not a professional, nor an inspector, but a source of support and critical friend.

**Monitoring and reporting to the governing body**

The literacy governor should:
- try and attend some INSET courses;
- meet with the literacy co-ordinator every term to discuss how action is progressing and become better informed about school literacy issues;
- ask about resources allocated to literacy from the school budget;
- use termly visits to view the Literacy Hour in the classroom; and
- report to the governing body/committee as agreed.

**Practical ways a literacy governor can support the school**

* Find out about the National Year of Reading activities in 1998/99, locally and at national level (see section on other national literacy initiatives), and ask how governors can help. Make sure any school activity has governor and staff support.
*Ask the school to find out if there are any resources provided by the LEA which the school can use, for example, leaflets for parents on how to help with reading.
* Is there a school library service and, if so, what resources does it offer schools, for

example, a Big Book loan service. Find out the school's view of the service.
* Track a class for a morning. Look at the literacy demands of the class - are some pupils struggling? Are others bored? Are there different expectations across departments? (Remember you are visiting as a governor to become better informed about the school - you are not an inspector.)
* Write a section in the Annual Governors Report to Parents on progress on the school's literacy action plan.

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# 3. Primary schools and the National Literacy Strategy

**Introduction**
Learning to read and write at primary school provides the foundation for pupils' future learning. Primary school pupils who do not adequately learn to read and write become discouraged and de-motivated. Poor literacy skills, particularly at Key Stage 2, can contribute to poor behaviour and attendance, resulting in pupils falling even further behind. Tackling literacy now prevents the slide into further deterioration when pupils go to secondary school.
Governors will be aware of the need for early intervention strategies that help pupils who are identified as having difficulties in learning to read. Reading Recovery is perhaps the best known 'catch-up' strategy. Governors will need to be satisfied that pupils with difficulties are getting help, as soon as possible, in highly structured programmes delivered by trained staff. This may well be an issue the governing body will want to raise with the LEA.
Baseline testing, introduced into all primary schools in September 1998, will make it possible for governors, over time, to be able to compare children's achievements when they start school with their Key Stage 1 and 2 national test results. The governors should also receive regular reports based on the school's own system for assessing and recording progress. This will also make it easier for schools to set year-on-year targets based on their actual intake.

**The National Literacy Strategy and the Literacy Hour**
The Government has set a national target for 80% of 11 year olds to achieve Level 4 in the Key Stage 2 national tests in English by the year 2002. The National Literacy Strategy is a programme of action for achieving that target. The DfEE has agreed a local literacy target with every LEA; each primary school governing body, along with the headteacher and staff, has to set realistic but challenging targets for their school.
Primary schools in England will begin to teach the daily Literacy Hour to all pupils in the autumn term 1998. This is central to the government's strategy for raising literacy standards in primary schools. Standards will also be helped if the school ethos positively encourages and values reading and writing for pleasure.
The response from schools taking part in the pilot National Literacy Project was that the Literacy Hour raised standards, but governors will appreciate that introducing the Literacy Hour in every class is a major undertaking for many schools. Teachers may find the changes quite demanding at first, and children will have to get used to new routines. Governors should be sensitive to this and offer encouragement.

**What exactly happens in the Literacy Hour?**

**The Literacy Hour consists of :**

1. Whole class sharing a text together, with a balance of reading and writing
2. Teacher-directed phonics, spelling, vocabulary work (word work)
   At Key Stage 2, this will also include grammar and punctuation (sentence work)
3. Group and independent work (guided text work)
4. Reviewing with the whole class what has been achieved, including pupil presentations of their work

The format of the Literacy Hour allows pupils to spend around 75% of their time being directly taught by the teacher, much of this as a whole class, but also in smaller groups. There is a clear emphasis on teaching phonics and spelling, right from the early stages. This is not done in isolation from reading for meaning. The Literacy Hour encourages children to become familiar with texts through shared and guided reading sessions, followed by a systematic emphasis on teaching phonics and grammatical structure. For some teachers this will be a challenge, and they will need to refresh their own knowledge of English grammar in order to be able to teach it effectively and answer children's questions. Every school has been sent copies of the National Literacy Strategy Framework for teaching, a practical planning and teaching tool for teachers.
Of course, literacy is already a high priority in primary schools. The difference now is that the Framework provides a structured, term-by-term guide as to what should be taught during a child's time at primary school.

**The Literacy Hour - how governors can support their schools**

Governors should give priority in the school development plan to the implementation of the National Literacy Strategy. The school should have already carried out a literacy audit resulting in a literacy action plan.

**Budgetary/ resources**

All classes need to have sufficient books to deliver the Literacy Hour. The major expense will be for a range of 'Big Books' for whole-class sessions and multiple copies of books for shared reading. Other resources may also be needed to support whole-class teaching. The DfEE has provided resources for books in 1998/99.

**Training**

Training and support for the Literacy Hour will be the focus for primary schools' INSET days and twilight sessions during 1998/99. The DfEE has asked schools to devote three INSET days during the year to literacy and provides national training materials to use for this. Some schools with pressing literacy needs will receive 'intensive' training support involving a week's course and follow-up support in school from an LEA literacy consultant.

**Setting literacy targets**

All schools will have set Key Stage 2 literacy targets. In order to achieve these targets, schools will have to acknowledge existing strengths and weaknesses emerging from their

literacy audit.

**Communication with parents**

Governors need to ensure that schools are communicating with parents the changes to the teaching of reading that the Literacy Hour brings. Parents may be concerned that teachers will not hear individual children read in the traditional way. However, the Literacy Hour provides much more direct contact with the teacher, providing an efficient and effective method for monitoring and assessing children's progress. The teacher also provides a model to the pupils on how to develop strategies to help them tackle unfamiliar words. It is still important, of course, that children read to and with other adults.

**Questions for governors to ask**

**On the Literacy Hour**

What strengths and weaknesses emerged from the school's literacy audit?
Does the Literacy Hour work better in some classes than others? Why?
Is the Literacy Hour an agenda item for the Spring Term 1999 Governors' meeting?

**On resourcing the Literacy Hour**

How did the school spend the funding for books provided by the DfEE in 1998?
Are there sufficient books?
How are learning support/classroom assistants being trained and used in the Hour?

**On training issues**

Is the school allocating three days of INSET to literacy in 1998/99?
What use is the school making of the planning formats in the Framework?
Does the literacy co-ordinator have sufficient time to monitor and support implementation?
How are teachers learning from and supporting each other in delivering the Literacy Hour? Have staff training needs been identified?

**On setting literacy targets**

Is the school receiving professional advice and support from the LEA to help in achieving the targets?
Target setting ought to involve pupils. Do they understand and help to define their own targets?

**On informing parents**

Are parents aware of the introduction of the Literacy Hour in the school? In what way?
What efforts has the school made to explain the changes? How are parents encouraged to ask questions and help?
Is the governing body using the Annual Report to Parents and Annual Meeting to explain how the National Literacy Strategy is being implemented in the school?
How does the school inform parents of their child's literacy targets and progress?
Are parents' views taken on board?

**The Literacy Hour - other issues**

**The primary curriculum**

From September 1998, primary schools have greater flexibility in their approach to the curriculum. They still have to provide a broad and balanced curriculum, but are now able to choose which elements of the programmes of study for art, design and technology, geography, history, music and physical education to teach. Thus time has been freed up for the Literacy Hour.

The Literacy Hour will provide an opportunity to use non-fiction texts, for example, a historical narrative or scientific text, and to look at vocabulary, structure and writing style to provide a meaningful context for children's learning. The purpose of the hour is, however, to focus on text, and the other curriculum aspects (for example, the historical or scientific issues) can be addressed on other occasions.

**Boys and the Literacy Hour**

Boys respond well to a structured learning environment which the Literacy Hour provides. In 1997 30% of 7-year old girls reached National Curriculum Level 3 in Reading compared with just 23% of boys. At 11, 69% of girls but 57% of boys reached Level 4 in English. Whereas in the past boys used to catch up in secondary schools, increasingly girls have been staying ahead.

**Children with special educational needs (SEN)**

Evidence from the National Literacy Project, on which the national strategy is based, showed that children with special needs benefited from whole class and guided group work. The repeated focus on reading and sharing texts for meaning and understanding, followed by a detailed examination of words and sentence structure, all reinforces the strategies that poor readers need in order to tackle unfamiliar words. Good teaching strategies such as these help all children learn and progress.

**Literacy for bilingual learners**

It is important to identify and address the learning needs of pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) in the school's literacy action plan. These pupils may need specific help during the Hour and extra support to reinforce what is being taught.

Questions for governors to ask

**On the curriculum**

Do all children have access to a broad and balanced curriculum that meets their needs?
Do parents understand the need for the school to concentrate on literacy possibly at the expense of other subjects?

**On boys' achievement**

What steps is your school taking to raise boys' achievement?
Does the school have a good selection of non-fiction texts and fiction of interest to boys?

**On special needs**

How is the school addressing the needs of SEN pupils during the Hour?
How are special needs/teaching assistants being used to help plan, and teach, the Hour?
Are the literacy needs of SEN pupils included in their Individual Education Plans(IEP)?

**On bilingual learners**

How do EAL pupils progress in literacy, particularly compared to other pupils? How many have, in addition, special educational needs?
How does the school use their knowledge of languages other than English to support their development of literacy skills?
How is the expertise of specialist staff being used to help plan, and teach, the Hour?
Are there any books in school in dual languages?

Promoting a school ethos that values literacy

All skills need to be practised; pupils who enjoy reading and writing, and are willing to do these outside the curriculum, are more likely to do them well. Schools have an important role in nourishing and sustaining this interest.
Many primary schools have a yearly programme of events that includes authors visiting schools, Book Weeks and writing workshops. Day-to-day, there are many ways of showing that the school values literacy, such as using assemblies to share good books and celebrate pupils' written achievements, as well as ensuring that the school library is used regularly and imaginatively. Displays of well-presented writing by pupils give a clear message about how the school values their literacy achievements.
Competitions and events that reward high achievement and excellent progress can inspire budding young writers. Inviting poets, authors and illustrators to share their expertise and love of their profession can enthuse pupils to practise these skills themselves.
Involving role models, particularly for boys, can help pupils to see that literacy is fun and relevant to real life, thus encouraging them to work at improving their skills.

**Questions for governors to ask**

How does the school support reading for pleasure? How does it celebrate literacy?
How is the governing body working with staff to support the National Year of Reading?
How does the school utilise all its resources (books, materials and displays as well as electronic media) to promote reading and writing?
Do parents attend reading and writing events or celebrations?
Are pupils using the school library?
Does the school offer a range of reading books catering for all abilities, cultural background and tastes, especially boys?
What links does the school have with the local library?

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# 4. Other national literacy initiatives

**A) National Year of Reading**

The National Year of Reading runs from September 1998 to August 1999. Its aim is to support teachers' efforts in the classroom by encouraging positive attitudes to reading throughout the community and it is intended that these new reading initiatives will be sustained well beyond the Year. It will provide lots of opportunities to promote the power and enjoyment of reading, with many activities aimed at promoting reading amongst

boys and men. During the Year, individuals and organisations, including schools, are encouraged to get involved. School governors can support their schools by helping with reading events or book fairs, introducing local authors, supporting reading volunteer initiatives, encouraging schools to celebrate reading achievement through special assemblies, displays and awards and looking for local business links. A special edition of Literacy Today provides practical suggestions on how schools, among others, can get involved.

**Illustration**
Oakwood School, Walsall, is planning two events per term during the National Year of Reading. The first term's events will include an invitation to a DJ from the local radio station, along with their chosen book, to a party with the theme of 'My Favourite Book'. In November the school will be holding a reading week during which friends, parents, governors and LEA members will be invited to come and read with the children. A player from Aston Villa Football Club has also been invited to act as the school's 'celebrity role model'.

**B) After-school support for literacy**

After-school clubs can support children's learning through curriculum-related activities such as computer clubs during which they can practise their reading and writing skills. The Government has produced a national framework document for the development of study support. The Prince's Trust and Education Extra can provide advice for schools on setting up and managing study support activities (see Resources).

**Illustration**
Walker Comprehensive School in Newcastle upon Tyne runs a homework club in the Learning Support Study Centre where the investment in new technology has motivated pupils to return at the end of the day. The use of computers to produce high quality well-presented work, improves concentration and raises the self-esteem of pupils.

**Illustration**
'Playing for Success' is a Government initiative to encourage the setting up of study support centres within or near Premier League and Division One Football Clubs. Using the environment and medium of football, the centres will concentrate on improving young people's literacy and numeracy, increasing their motivation and helping them to become independent learners. The centres will be equipped with first class ICT facilities and operate out of school hours - after school, at weekends and in the holidays. To date, 29 clubs have agreed to take part.

**Illustration**
Cross Flats Primary School in Beeston, Leeds has set up a family centre in the school grounds, with support from Crime Concern. The centre encourages parents to help their children with homework by providing access to computers and other resources.

**C) Summer Literacy Schools**

Summer literacy schools provide an opportunity for children aged 11 who have not achieved Key Stage 2 Level 4 to take part voluntarily in a short course over the holidays

to improve their literacy skills, usually based at the secondary school to which they will transfer. Most summer schools provide some intensive literacy-based work followed by more activities which, while enjoyable and fun, give the children the opportunity to practise and extend their literacy skills. Many of the schools are supported by local businesses which provide, for example, breakfast and other refreshments, prizes and certificates, T-shirts and outings. A celebration day or ceremony rewards the children's efforts at the end of the project.

**Illustration**
Patcham High School in Brighton ran a summer literacy school in 1998. The daily two hours of reading and writing activities included opportunities to read with and to adults, and drew heavily on the Literacy Hour approach. The children then took part in different workshops such as information technology, acrostic book making and photography. Recreational activities followed which gave children opportunities for practising their reading and writing skills. While test results are not yet available, it is clear that the children gained in confidence and had a very worthwhile induction into secondary education.

**D) The Standards Site**

The Standards and Effectiveness Unit has set up a website, the Standards Site http://www.standards.dfee.gov.uk which provides access to the National Strategy Framework for teaching and will expand to include additional strategy materials. The Standards Site allows teachers to exchange ideas on literacy and other issues relating to standards of achievement in schools.

**Questions for governors to ask**
What could the governing body do to promote the National Year of Reading?
Has anyone contacted the NYR co-ordinator to find out what is happening?
Are there summer literacy schools in your area? Is the school either running one or applying for places at one?
Is the school making use of the Standards and Effectiveness Unit website?

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# 5.Literacy in secondary schools

Secondary school governors will be aware that, increasingly, the focus is on raising literacy standards. The publication of examination results and OFSTED reports, the requirement for schools to set targets to improve their performance benchmarked against other comparable schools mean that governors will know a lot more about their school's performance. The introduction of the Literacy Hour in primary schools in September 1998 will improve the skills of those children transferring to secondary schools in subsequent years. A copy of the National Literacy Strategy Framework for teaching was sent to every secondary school.
Governors will need to agree the priorities for the school in terms of literacy, and ensure they are incorporated into the school development plan. Many approaches to raising performance generally, such as improving the quality of teaching, individual pupil

monitoring or focusing on boys, will impact on achievement in literacy. However, where pupil potential is undermined by poor literacy skills, secondary schools need to take action.
Literacy is the key issue for many schools that are under-performing. Pupils with poor reading and writing skills will fall rapidly behind at secondary level, making them feel frustrated and angry, which can lead to poor behaviour, absenteeism, truancy and low attainment. Focusing on raising literacy standards will have a positive impact on student motivation, self-esteem, behaviour and, ultimately, achievement.

**Illustration**
*St George Community School's (Bristol) three-year Literacy Improvement Project started with Year 8 pupils, giving them a new subject called 'achievement'. Teaching groups were small and set according to ability with the least able groups working on phonics and spelling and the more able on more demanding comprehension, grammar and writing tasks. All of the groups read silently every week as part of the programme. The school also aimed to create a reading culture through the use of reading volunteers who heard children read for 10 minutes each week, with support from the Reading Is Fundamental programme which provides books for the pupils to take home and keep. After the first year, test results showed a marked improvement in reading and spelling.

**Initial questions secondary school governors could ask about literacy**

Does the whole school community, including governors, challenge the level of aspirations and achievements of pupils?
Is developing literacy across the curriculum seen as an issue for all pupils?
Is the quality of student writing at a sufficiently high level to enable them to achieve their potential in examinations?
What has the school done to make the staff knowledgeable about the National Literacy Strategy?
What is the school doing to respond to pupils transferring who have experienced the National Literacy Strategy in their last year(s) at primary school?
What use is made of Key Stage 2 data on literacy?

**1998 pilot schemes**

The Government is funding pilot schemes in 22 LEAs in 1998-99 for developing strategies for tackling low literacy standards in the first years of secondary schools. Projects include:

- adapting the Literacy Hour to Year 7;
- changing the culture of the school to become a more literate community;
- improving links between the English curriculum and other subjects;
- providing literacy training for secondary teachers; and
- developing effective short-term catch-up programmes.

**Issues for governors developing a whole-school approach to literacy**

**Management**
A secondary school literacy policy needs committed and enthusiastic senior management support to ensure that it is given a high priority.

**Literacy teaching across the curriculum**

For literacy to become a whole-school issue, teachers in individual departments need to accept that they are all teachers of language. Each department needs to consider what the literacy requirements are for their area, the vocabulary specific to their subject, the range of texts used and the writing styles pupils will need to adopt to be successful.

There is a particular challenge to develop expertise in non-fiction writing, including knowledge of grammatical structure. Secondary schools need to examine whether this is systematically taught, and reinforced by each department.
The form tutor is the link between school and home and can play a key role in promoting positive attitudes to reading among pupils. Some schools encourage private reading in tutor time and provide 'book boxes' of interesting reading material, including newspapers and even comics, as a way of encouraging the reading habit that can then lead on to a wider range of reading material.

**Illustration**
Phoenix High School, London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham, has made literacy a high priority. Since September 1997 tutor time has been given to everyone reading in class, while pupils in Years 9 and 10 have volunteered to become reading mentors to younger pupils. Important key words in each subject area are displayed in classrooms. LEA subject inspectors comment that there has been an improvement in the amount of class reading across the curriculum and that there is a greater focus on key words during lessons.

**Ensuring effective support systems for pupils with literacy difficulties**
To identify those pupils who have fallen behind with literacy, the school needs an effective assessment procedure, including good primary liaison and use of Key Stage 2 data. Schools should have systems that inform all staff of pupil targets so they can take account of them in their own lesson planning.

**Creating a positive reading and writing ethos in the school**
The school ethos should encourage pupils to read and write beyond the curriculum requirements. As in primary schools, the secondary school too can demonstrate how it values literacy, for example, through sharing good books, celebrating pupils' written achievements at school assemblies and encouraging greater use of the school library. Pupils often enjoy taking part in writing competitions and events; successes need to be acknowledged and promoted. Role models, particularly for boys, can communicate the message that reading is important for life. Schools could also use displays and posters to encourage pupils to read. Inviting, for example, poets, authors and illustrators to share their expertise and love of their profession stimulates and supports pupil writing.

**Illustration**
Park Hall School, Birmingham, set aside 40 minutes one day for everyone to read. 1,600 students, 101 teachers, the nurse, cooks, cleaners, caretakers and admin staff all took part. In the build up to the event, students wrote to their favourite celebrities to discover which book they would choose to read, receiving hundreds of responses. Everyone in the school was talking about what they were reading and displays gave 'reading profiles' of adults who worked in the school, in whatever capacity. The success of the 'Time to Read' initiative was demonstrated by an increase in the number of books pupils read.

**Illustration**
Milham Ford School, Oxford, is a comprehensive school for girls 13-19 which used the visit of author Beverley Naidoo to celebrate World Book Day in April 1998 to do some cross-phase work with Marston Middle School. Students from Milham Ford were selected to participate in the workshops by submitting a story for the school story writing competition. Pupils from Marston spent the day at Milham Ford in the newly refurbished library. The morning was spent studying Beverley Naidoo's famous text 'Journey to Jo'burg', which all the students had read, and exploring plot and character analysis. A creative story writing workshop followed, leading to some exciting and imaginative stories. The pupils went away with their imaginations fired and a door to their creativity unlocked.

**Questions for governors to ask**

**On management**
Is a member of the senior management team responsible for the school literacy policy?
Is literacy on the agenda of departmental meetings?
Is there a regular report to governors on progress?

**On literacy across the curriculum**
How is the school encouraging a coherent approach to teaching literacy in all curriculum areas and within tutor time?
Each subject has its own vocabulary: is this specifically taught?
Are pupils taught how to use reference materials? By whom?
Can pupils use appropriate writing styles when, for example, presenting an argument, writing a report or writing up an experiment?
Are subject teachers equipped to promote literacy skills? Has training been provided?

**On pupils with literacy difficulties**
How is support provided for pupils with literacy difficulties?
What systems are in place to ensure that subject teachers are aware of these pupils' difficulties?
How is ICT used to support these pupils and boost their confidence and motivation?
How does the SENCO review Individual Education Plans (IEPs) in the light of the literacy strategy?

**On encouraging reading and writing for pleasure**
How does the school support reading for pleasure? How is literacy celebrated in your school?
How does it use all the school's resources (books, materials and displays as well as electronic media) to promote reading and writing?
Do parents attend reading and writing events or celebrations?
Are pupils using the school library? Do Year 7 classes have library time? Does the range of books reflect the needs and interests of the pupils (especially boys)?

**Illustration**
Hillside School, Hertfordshire, has a pro-active approach to encouraging reluctant readers. Imaginative book displays around a theme, a returns trolley which gives the message 'other people like these books' and a collection on the same trolley of graphic novels to attract the less keen boys, all encourage book borrowings.

**Illustration**
The Wakeman School, Shropshire, conducted a survey into boys' and girls' reading. The results were analysed and, as a result, library lessons became more focused through the introduction of reading diaries. There was a greater emphasis on non-fiction texts as a way of encouraging boys to get into the reading habit.

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# 6. Partnership with parents

Governing bodies are a very important link between the school and its parents. They have a duty to make sure that the school is communicating with, and accountable to, parents and this applies to the literacy strategy and every other aspect of school life. The Government is committed to encouraging parents and the community to support schools and help children learn.

**Working with parents**

Research has shown that children learn best when parents support and encourage their literacy development. Partnership with parents is a vital part of a school's literacy policy, particularly, but not exclusively, in the primary school. Sharing targets with parents, listening to their views and enlisting their support should greatly improve the rate of success. Not all parents will automatically know the best way to support their children, and governors need to ask how schools can inform and support parents at the different key stages.

**Illustration**
Lochoin Primary School, Glasgow, is extending its 'Tell a Story' project during the National Year of Reading to involve the whole school in the programme of activities. The programme aims to encourage a love of books and storytelling by involving the family through workshops, designing bookmarks, writing stories and holding author visits. The parents' group is helping the school to develop an infants' lending library between local schools, thus increasing the number and range of books on loan.

**Illustration**
The Whartons Primary School in Otley, Yorkshire, is planning to hold two Book Fairs for parents and pupils during the National Year of Reading, a storytime session including parents and friends of the school and a Dads' Day when fathers come into the school to read to the children. The school anticipates that these events will encourage more reading to take place, at home as well as at school.

**Family Literacy**

Family literacy programmes recognise the importance of the family in children's learning. They provide opportunities for parents to find out how they can help their children develop their literacy skills, through activities such as storytelling, sharing stories and book making. Parents also have opportunities to improve their own reading and writing skills.

**Illustration**
Family literacy courses typically consist of a 12-week course taking place on school premises. There are three types of weekly sessions: child-only, parent-only and child and parent together. Family literacy can be delivered, in addition, to bilingual families. Family literacy work can also take place in community settings such as mother and toddler groups and libraries. LEAs can bid for funding for family literacy programmes, supported by local colleges. Research shows that gains made by children who had participated in the Basic Skills Agency family literacy demonstration programme were sustained two years later. Their educational prospects were better than they would have been without family literacy.

**Illustration**
Foxhayes First School in Exeter and the Adult Basic Skills Unit of Exeter College ran a successful family literacy project. Through discussions between the school and the outreach worker from the college, it was decided to target those families where the children were falling behind with their reading and run a 10-week course. The parents gained a great deal and became more confident in helping their children with reading. The school plans to repeat the course in the future.

**Illustration**
Nelson Mandela Community Primary School in Birmingham runs a family literacy project mainly attended by Pakistani and Bengali parents whose children attend the school. The project emphasises the role of parents as well as older brothers and sisters in helping improve children's literacy. Award ceremonies during whole-school assembly, at which certificates are presented to mark the level of proficiency achieved by younger siblings, support this view. As well as encouraging children to progress in reading, the project also breaks down barriers between parents and school.

**Illustration**
Walker Secondary School in Newcastle upon Tyne introduced a family literacy group to give parents the opportunity to develop their computer skills alongside their youngsters. The course was a resounding success. Pupils became more confident in using IT to complete their homework while parents enjoyed working with their children to learn new skills. Many parents went on to take college courses and gained accreditation.

**Questions governors could ask**

**On communication:**
Does the school hold open days, exhibitions or run workshops to explain the reading and writing curriculum to parents? Does this include advice to parents on how to support homework?
Does the school send out leaflets that explain to parents how they can help their children's language development, including reading and writing, at home? Are there versions of the leaflet in other languages?

**On support for parents:**
Are parents encouraged to read to their children at home through a home school reading scheme?
Are they encouraged to help their child at home with specific literacy targets?
Does the school encourage, train and support parents to volunteer to help in the school

with reading?
Is it possible for schools to support parents who wish to improve their own levels of literacy, for example, by exploring the possibility of running family literacy programmes? Can the LEA help?

# 7. Working with the community

**Enlisting business support**

Relationships with local business should be fostered as they can bring very tangible benefits to the school. When asking for business support, it is important to be clear what
it is you are looking for. If it is financial support, governors need to be clear how this fits
into the school literacy action plan and why it cannot be funded from the school budget. Business volunteers help pupils to see the relevance of literacy skills to real life, while providing a good opportunity for the employees to become involved in their communities.

**Examples of how business can help schools with literacy include:**
- support for paired reading schemes, including encouraging employees to become reading volunteers
- providing funds to support refreshments, prizes, books, for example, at summer literacy projects
- supporting the publishing of children's writing including poetry.

**Exploiting governor contacts**

A reading or writing event at school is an opportunity for governors to show their support. Governors often have contacts in business, in the community or in the media who could be used to ensure that the event is a success. Governors' attendance at events also gives a clear message of support to the school community.

**Illustration**
'Read It' run by Leeds Education 2000, a registered charity, aims to make literacy a community concern. Involving parents, children and schools as well as bookstores, publishers and community groups, it publishes a regular newsletter, printed by the Yorkshire Evening Post, as well as packs containing games, poems and stories. Local companies, such as GE Capital, encourage staff to get involved as reading volunteers in schools. Leeds Education 2000 believes that the community plays a key role in helping to raise standards and providing the motivation for reading.

**Reading volunteers**
Research has shown that children benefit from practising reading one-to-one. Most parents read with their children at home but, where there are difficulties for whatever reason, recruiting volunteers to provide one-to one help can make a huge difference to children's confidence and enjoyment in reading. This will also help in the context of the

Literacy Hour, with its emphasis on whole-class and guided reading in small groups rather than the teacher hearing individual children read on a regular basis.

**Illustration**
The Knowsley Reading Project trained adult volunteers, including parents, to go into schools to give primary pupils regular help with their reading, under the guidance of the teacher. The evaluation from the National Foundation for Educational Research showed that children's reading ages improved 20 months in a year. The role of volunteers was found to be a key element.

**Illustration**
Stags Lane First School in the London Borough of Harrow welcomes volunteers every week from BACS (the banks' data clearing organisation) to listen to children read. Half of the school-trained volunteers are men which makes a change for the children as there is an all-female staff. The school is in no doubt that the children have made progress being heard reading on a regular basis. The volunteers benefit too: many report that they feel happier and less stressed.

**Questions governors could ask on business and community involvement**

Are governor contacts taken up and used by the school?
Are school events to celebrate literacy given coverage in the local media?
Are local councillors, the mayor and 'friends of the school' invited to school plays, poetry events, writing festivals or exhibitions of children's writing?
Does the governing body include representatives from the business community? Have they been asked for ideas on how they can support the school's literacy action plan?
Would the school like more volunteers and what can governors do to help?
Have efforts been made to encourage reading volunteers from the local community?

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# 8. Resources for Governors

**Arts resources**

Books for Keeps is a children's book magazine produced by the School Bookshop Assoc. Ltd. Available on subscription £17.50 for six issues. Telephone order service: 0181 852 4953.

Book Trust, a charity which promotes the book, initiated the Books for Babies project known as Bookstart and runs Young Book Trust which organises National Children's Book Week. Contact: YBT, Book House, 45, East Hill, London SW18 2QZ Tel: 0181 516 2984.

The British Library has a diverse education programme which is free to schools and provides a free termly newsletter for teachers. Tel: 0171 412 7797 for more details.

NAWE - The National Association of Writers in Education aims to represent and support writers, teachers and all those involved in the development of creative writing in

education. They have a website www.nawe.co.uk which has a searchable database of writers who can go into schools. Tel/Fax: 01653 618429.

The Poetry Society runs National Poetry Day (8 Oct), the Young National Poetry Competition and membership schemes for schools. Telephone: 0171 420 9890 - the Poetry Information Line or contact the Poetry Information Society at www.poetrysoc.com

Readathon, the sponsored national read, is now in its fourteenth year. It is often used by schools as part of National Children's Book Week. Children undertake to read books of their choice in return for pledges of money. It raises over £1 million annually to help sick children and is a proven way of stimulating children to read recreationally. Enrolled organisations receive a Readathon pack at the start of September. PO Box 89, Chipping Norton, OX7 4PR Tel: 01608 730335.

Speaking of Books provides schools with access to leading writers, illustrators and storytellers at prices that schools can afford. They will also organise INSET days and provide book stalls. Contact Jan Powling, Speaking of Books, 9, Guildford Grove, Greenwich, London SE 10 8JY. Tel/Fax 0181 692 4704.

Writers in Schools is an Arts Council project to place writers in schools. For more information contact Christine Paris, Literature Department, Arts Council of England, 14, Great Peter St London SW1P 3NQ.Tel: 0171 333 0100.

**Business support**

Business in the Community's 'Aim High' campaign encourages companies to work with schools and colleges to help raise achievement in education. 44 Baker Street, London W1M 1DH Tel: 0171 224 1600.

Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs) are independent local companies led by business people working under performance related contracts to the Government. They support schools through their Education Business Partnerships. For information about your area, telephone 0171 735 0010, or more details on EBPs, telephone 01740 652 681.

**Funding sources**

Education Extra funds out-of-school hours projects and summer literacy schemes. It also provides resources including a Summer Literacy Handbook and a Summer Literacy Resources pack. 17 Old Ford Road, Bethnal Green, London E2 9PL. Tel: 0181 983 1061.

Family Learning Millennium Awards, run by the Pre-school Learning Alliance and funded by the Millennium Commission, provide grants of between £1,500 and £10,000 for individuals to develop family learning projects with priority for projects involving those who are isolated or disadvantaged in some way. There are four area offices: North - 01772 423551; Central 0121 643 0071; South West 0117 922 1919; and South East 01732 770630.

The Prince's Trust offers advice on setting up study support centres. 18 Park Square East, London NW1 4LH Tel: 0171 543 1234 Fax: 0171 543 1200.

**Governor organisations**

Advisory Centre for Education (ACE) Ltd provides advice and publications for schools and parents. ACE, 1b Aberdeen Studios, 22-24 Highbury Grove, London N5 2DQ Tel: 0171 354 8318 Fax: 0171 354 9069.

Information for School and College Governors (ISCG) provides a free advice line with open access to all governors. It publishes checklists and reports on governor issues. It provides seminars for governing bodies in schools and LEAs and also runs larger conferences and conventions. Its representative Soundings Panel acts as a research panel on governor issues. ISCG, Avondale Park School, Sirdar Road, London W11 4EE Tel: 0171 229 0200; Fax: 0171 229 0651.

National Association of Governors and Managers (NAGM) offers an annual membership subscription to individual governors and governing bodies for which they provide a newsletter, general information and publications and access to an advice line. NAGM, 21 Bennets Hill, Birmingham B2 5QP Tel: 0121 643 5787.

National Governors Council (NGC) is an independent forum for governing body associations in local education authorities, providing advice and support for governors and governing bodies. NGC, Glebe House, Church Street, Crediton, Devon, EX17 2AF Tel: 01363 774377 Fax: 01363 776007.

www.governyourschool.co.uk - a website dedicated to providing information and guidance to school governors.

**Literacy organisations**

Basic Skills Agency (BSA) is the national development agency for literacy, numeracy and related basic skills in England and Wales. It promotes, initiates and supports development of basic skills provision and resources, including a Basic Skills Quality Mark for Primary Schools and a Basic Skills Quality Mark for Secondary Schools. BSA, Commonwealth House, 1-19 New Oxford Street, London WC1A 1NU Tel: 0171 405 4017 Fax: 0171 404 5038. Publications hotline: 0870600 2400.

BBC - Broadcast Support Service produces videos and publications on literacy and provides other learning resources. PO Box 7, London W12 8UD.

British Dyslexia Association provides information, advice and publications on dyslexia. 98 London Road, Reading, RG1 5AU. Tel: 0118 966 2677 Helpline: 01189 668271.

Centre for Language in Primary Education. Publications include a Reading Together Parents' Handbook. Webber Row, London SE1 8QW Tel: 0171 633 0840.

The Dyslexia Institute offers training, teaching, advice and assessment nation-wide. 133 Gresham Road, Staines, Middx.TW18 2AJ Tel: 01784 463851 Fax: 01784 460747.

National Literacy Trust provides a wide range of information on literacy (www.literacytrust.org.uk), publishes a quarterly journal Literacy Today, and publications

like Building a Literate Nation. The Trust also provides information and support for the National Year of Reading. Swire House, 59 Buckingham Gate, London SW1E 6AJ Tel: 0171 828 2435 Fax: 0171 931 9986

The National Year of Reading takes place between September 1998- August 1999. Contact the team for advice and support materials at the National Literacy Trust (see above). They also have their own website www.yearofreading.org.uk

Reading Is Fundamental, UK (RIF) is a National Literacy Trust project that aims to inspire children to become strong, motivated readers. RIF supports projects and its publications include The RIF Family Guide to Encouraging Young Readers £4-99. Contact RIF at the National Literacy Trust (see above).

Reading Language and Information Centre provides INSET, resources and publications on reading including pamphlets for parents. University of Reading, Bulmershe Court, Earley, Reading RG6 1HY, Tel: 0118 931 8820 Fax: 0118 931 6801.

Reading Recovery National Network produces Book Bands for Guided Reading: Organising KS1 Texts for the Literacy Hour available from the Institute of Education's bookshop. Price £12.00 (inc.p&p) Tel: 0171 612 6050 Fax: 0171 612 6126.

**Government publications**

Baseline Assessment for pupils starting primary school, DfEE Circular 6/98

Desirable outcomes for children's learning on entering compulsory education, DfEE/QCA 1996 ISBN 0 855224780

Extending opportunity: a national framework for study support, DfEE ISBN 0 855227559

From targets to Action: Guidance to support effective target setting in schools. DfEE 1997 ISBN 0 855226722

The Implementation of the National Literacy Strategy, DfEE ISBN 0 855226307

The Implementation of the National Literacy Strategy - A summary for primary schools, DfEE 0 855226552

The Summer Literacy Schools: an evaluation of the 1997 pilot scheme by Education Extra.

All the above publications are available from the DfEE's publications centre, Prolog on 0845 6022260

Other useful publications

Can do Better: Raising boys' achievement 1998 Qualifications and Curriculum Authority .Information on how to order, Tel: 01787 884444.

What works in Secondary Schools? Catching up with basic skills and Improving Boys' Literacy: a survey of effective practice in secondary schools both available from the Basic Skills Agency (see literacy organisations).

Literacy and the secondary governor- A guide for governors, ISCG (see governor organisations).

**Volunteering organisations**

Community Service Volunteers (CSV)'s Reading Together Scheme offers training to students in paired reading techniques to help school children, aged between 7 and 12, to improve their reading and writing skills. Schools can also ask for older pupils to take part in the training. 237 Pentonville Road, London N1 9NJ Tel: 0171 278 6601 Fax: 0171 833 0149.

Volunteer Reading Help (VRH) trains volunteers from the local community to give individual help to primary school children having difficulties in learning to read. VRH, High Holborn House, 52-54 High Holborn, London WC1V 6RL Tel: 0171 404 6204.

**Websites**

Basic Skills Agency website http://www.basic-skills.co.uk

National Association of Writers in Education website http://www.nawe.co.uk

National Grid for Learning website http://vtc.ngfl.gov.uk

National Literacy Trust website

and National Year of Reading and National Reading Campaign

Standards and Effectiveness Unit website

www.governyourschool.co.uk - a website dedicated to providing information and guidance to school governors.

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